

# GOVERNOR NAPOLITANO'S SCHOOL READINESS ACTION PLAN FACT SHEET

Governor Napolitano has outlined a 5-year School Readiness Action Plan to ensure all children in Arizona begin 1<sup>st</sup> grade safe, healthy and ready to succeed by developing a coordinated quality early childhood education system for families and children in Arizona birth through kindergarten.

## **Why early childhood education is important:**

- Early childhood education is the foundation for learning and readiness for school. It focuses on the cognitive development of young children and includes parent education, child care/preschool, Head Start, kindergarten and linkages to health services.
- High-quality early childhood education is one of the most effective strategies to ensure children begin school with the skills they need to succeed and therefore remain in school through graduation. High quality education results in higher reading skills, better test scores and fewer behavioral problems.
- 90% of a child's brain is developed from birth to 3 years old. Many Arizona children may spend 30-40 hours per week for as long as 5 years in out-of-home care before they start kindergarten. If children do not receive high-quality early learning experiences, the learning readiness gap has been set.
- Parents need to be informed consumers so they know that their children are in high-quality early childhood settings.
- High-quality early childhood education includes awareness of and referral to health screening to identify problems affecting readiness to learn.

## **What happens to our children effects us all:**

- It is in all of our best interests to give children the tools they need early on for success. A young person who drops out of school has an increased chance of becoming a drain on the economy, rather than a productive member of society.
- Arizona has one of the worst high school dropout rates in the nation and achievement scores have consistently been below the national average.
- A better-educated workforce will help Arizona's economy by attracting new business and workers to the State.
- Studies have demonstrated that for every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood education, there is a corresponding \$8 in long-term savings in criminal justice, welfare and other costs. Economic research shows that investment in early childhood development programs brings an inflation adjusted public return of 12% and a total public and private return of 16%.

## **First steps of Governor Napolitano's School Readiness Action Plan**

### **Legislative Actions:**

- The Governor has requested \$25.5 million to phase-in voluntary full-day kindergarten for 252 schools that have 90% or more of their children on free and reduced lunch.
- The Governor has requested \$24.2 million to assist families who earn low wages to afford the cost of child care. Currently, 8,000 children are eligible for subsidies, but are on a "waiting list." That number is projected to increase to 14,000 by the end of the fiscal year. The Governor's budget request will cut the waiting list in half.
- The Governor has requested \$1 million for five additional health and safety-licensing workers and ten early childhood development specialists to help child care centers and preschools improve quality.
- The Governor has requested \$8.7 million to expand Healthy Families, a successful program designed to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

### **Administrative Actions:**

- Governor Napolitano will establish an Early Education Fund by raising \$2 million in private donations by November 2004. Funds will be allocated as grants to local communities to enhance high quality early childhood education.
- The Governor's School Readiness Board will work with AHCCCS to increase the number of children who receive well-child health screens through EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Testing).
- The Governor's Office and ASU are partnering on a \$1.6 million federal grant to educate 300 early childhood education teachers.

### **Plans for 2005:**

- Begin a statewide Quality Rating System whereby parents can ascertain the quality of child care they choose for their child.
- Phase-in a statewide early childhood educator scholarship program using Workforce Investment Act Funds.
- Launch a statewide health consultation system to provide child care providers and preschools with access to a health professional.
- Increase investment in high quality preschool.